



## Godard and the Dziga Vertov Group: Film and Dialectics

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tain fundamental chapters. The first chapter is of course the travelogue, that is, the discovery that the camera can go about: it's peripatetic. The second chapter is the discovery by Flaherty that you can make a film of people on the spot, that is, you can get an insight of a dramatic sort, a dramatic pattern, on the spot with living people. But if course he did that in respect of far-away peoples, and he was romantic in that sense. The third chapter is our chapter, which is the discovery of the working people, that is, the drama on the doorstep, the drama of the ordinary.

But there is a fourth chapter that's very interesting, and that would be the chapter in which people began to talk not about making films *about* people but films *with* people. That was the beginning of *cinéma-vérité*, when people started going down and getting close to people, not as Flaherty did. Flaherty didn't really know what was going on among the Aran Islanders; he was too distant from them. But when the people went down and made *Housing Problems* in Stepney, they knew the people, and you could recognize right away that this was a new relationship entirely between the film-makers and the films, that they were making films with the people and that they were, well, very close to the people indeed. That's of course the real beginning of *cinéma-vérité*, and any effort by anybody else to say that *cinéma-vérité* has any other ori-

gin than in *Housing Problems* and the English documentary school, is just nonsense.

Of course the French are always finding phrases and discovering terms for things, but generally about ten years late, like for example *musique concrète*. When that started appearing and I was one day in Cannes—invited, I think by Jean Cocteau, to hear this amazing new world of *musique concrète*—I laughed if I did not sneer because it's something we'd all been playing with a long time before, maybe twelve years, something like ten years before. We'd Britten and all sorts of people involved.

However, the next chapter, this making films with people—you've still got the problem that you're making films with people and then going away again. Well, I see the next chapter being making films really locally, and there I'm following Zavattini. Zavattini once made a funny speech in which he thought it would be wonderful if all the villages in Italy were armed with cameras so that they could make films by themselves and write film letters to each other, and it was all supposed to be a great joke. I was the person who didn't laugh, because I think that *is* the next stage—not the villagers making film letters and sending them to each other, but the local film people making films to state their case politically or otherwise, to express themselves whether it's in journalistic or other terms.

So there you are. These are the chapters.

**JAMES ROY MacBEAN**

## Godard and the Dziga Vertov Group: Film and Dialectics

Godard is alive, well, and has just released a new film in Paris. Critically injured in June 1971 in a near-fatal *quartier latin* motorcycle accident, Godard pulled through six anxious months of hospitalization and was almost literally pieced back together in the course of several operations and skin grafts.

Appropriately, the film he and Jean-Pierre Gorin have just released bears the title *Tout va bien* (All's Well)—a title which they originally intended, long before Jean-Luc's accident, as an ironic comment on the self-satisfied optimism of bourgeois society. But the title has also picked up a very literal sense of well-being now

that Godard has successfully recovered from his injuries and is back to work. For the now 41-year-old Godard, *Tout va bien* is his twenty-fifth feature film in 13 years and the seventh film he has made collectively under the aegis of the Dziga Vertov Group.\*

With *Tout va bien* eagerly awaited at both the New York and San Francisco Festivals this fall, I think this is an opportune moment to undertake a retrospective look at the body of work issued up to now by the Dziga Vertov Group. Incidentally, such an appraisal seems all the more opportune just now in light of Jean-Pierre Gorin's recent disclosure that he and Godard intend to do a number of projects individually in the immediate future, although they still plan to do certain projects collectively.

Let us try to determine, then, what characterizes the films of the Dziga Vertov Group? Since I have already dealt elsewhere [see *Film Quarterly*, Winter 1970–71, and *Sight and Sound*, Summer 1971], with the first, *British Sounds*, and the third, *Vent d'Est*, of the Dziga Vertov Group's films, I shall here concentrate on *Pravda*, *Struggle in Italy*, and *Vladimir and Rosa*—the second, fourth, and fifth. Before discussing these films, however, a word should be said about *Till Victory*, Godard and Gorin's film on the Al Fatah liberation struggle in Palestine, which, had it been released, would have been their sixth and most ambitious film to date. Un-

fortunately, however, a number of problems have arisen which have caused Godard and Gorin to hold grave reservations about their film's analysis of the Palestinian situation—and, consequently, they have decided to withhold release of the film in its present form. Shot in Palestine during Spring 1970—at a time when the collapse of King Hussein's rule in Jordan seemed imminent and Yassir Arafat's Al Fatah organization seemed to have consolidated its position of leadership in the liberation struggle—*Till Victory* was to have been a *défense et illustration* of how the Fatah Movement's thorough, patient, and systematic planning and organization made it a model of revolutionary preparedness. The sudden turn of events which saw Hussein's troops rout the Palestinian guerillas in Fall 1970 and decisively in Spring 1971, however, came as a great surprise and disappointment to Godard and Gorin—as well as to many international observers.\* When I spoke with Gorin about *Till Victory* in Paris last summer he acknowledged that this setback at the practical level of revolutionary struggle was forcing him and Godard to take a long self-critical look at the theoretical analysis which led them to ally themselves with the Al Fatah position. Pending this autocritique—which, of course, had to await Godard's recovery from the accident—*Till Victory* was to remain in limbo. Their present plan is to transform the Palestinian film into a critical and self-critical analysis of how (and how *not*) to film history in the making.

All the films of the Dziga Vertov Group are fairly difficult to get to see. Even in America, where distribution rights have often been sold in advance as a means of raising the money to make each film, the Group's films have had very short commercial runs and have been limited

\*The nucleus of the Dziga Vertov Group has always been a partnership between Godard and one other person—first with Jean-Henri Roger (a young militant from Marseilles) for *British Sounds* and *Pravda*, then with Jean-Pierre Gorin (a 29-year-old former journalist and student activist) for the last five films the Group has made—but the collective planning and making of the Group's films have involved many other individuals and militant groups as well. (Incidentally, some Godard filmographies list *Un film comme les autres* [A Film Like All The Others] as the first of the Dziga Vertov Group's films; however, although this film on the French May riots of 1968 grew out of Godard's participation in some of the loosely organized militant groups that sprang up during that time, the film was finished in late 1968, which, to my knowledge, antedates by at least several months the founding of the Dziga Vertov Group. It should, I think, be considered a precursor of the Group's work rather than a part of it.)

\*Al Fatah was one of the first organizations to understand the Palestinian question as more than an Arab-Israeli confrontation and to concentrate on the urgent need for radical social change in the Arab countries, particularly in Jordan. Since the guerillas' setback in 1971 the Fatah Movement's generally disapproving attitude toward airplane hijackings and other acts of publicity-oriented terrorism has caused dissension—most notably with the "Black September Group" responsible for the murderous raid on the Israeli Olympic team.

for the most part to the university circuit. In France, it has been even more difficult to get to see them, for Godard has refused to release them commercially, and outside of an occasional screening at the Cinémathèque, the only opportunities to see these films have been screenings set up for groups of militant workers or militant students' organizations. (The arrangements for such screenings have been handled by the editors of *Cinéthique*—the highly influential journal of Marxist-Leninist film theory in France.)

The reason for this relative exclusiveness is fairly simple, and it is related to Godard's reasons for deciding to work collectively in the first place: in bourgeois capitalist society, art, like everything else, is above all a *commodity*—and the reputation of the artist is largely what determines the value of a work of art. But this value based on the artist's reputation is almost solely an *exchange value*: the art market, and, to a great extent, our art criticism (which is an appendage of the art market) do not take up the question of the *use value* of a work of art; or, if they do, it is only in terms of the decorative potential, the status potential, the investment potential, or—for the intellectuals—the work of art's potential for enabling us to *see* something in a new light. (Notice, by the way, the bias toward *contemplation* which is the bourgeois intellectual's trademark.) The way in which art is a product of class struggle, and how in each historical period and in each of its many stylistic trends, art is useful to the ruling class as an ideological tool which disseminates values (e.g., contemplation rather than action) that serve to perpetuate ruling class power and privilege—such considerations of *use value* are taboo. What is emphasized instead, and what builds an artist's reputation, is a *distinctive personal style*.

Originality, novelty, uniqueness, and individuality are the highest goods of bourgeois art; and these qualities, when conspicuously or flamboyantly displayed, are taken as emanations of genius. Moreover, since Duchamp, it is not even necessary that these qualities be manifested in the *execution* of a work of art; for Duchamp, though seeking to destroy the cult of the artist as creative genius, merely shifted our attention

from execution to *selection* of a work of art. Although his ready-mades seemed to negate the values of bourgeois art by asserting mass production instead of originality, commonplace familiarity instead of novelty, easy duplicability instead of uniqueness, and anonymity instead of individuality, in the end, the bourgeois values were dramatically reinforced, although shifted in their focus, by the simple fact that Duchamp's act of operating a reversal of the values inherent in a work of art could, itself, be reversed and turned back into a demonstration of the most brilliant originality, novelty, uniqueness and individuality . . . *not in the work of art itself but in the mind and sensibility of the artist!* The old adage "le style, c'est l'homme" thus attains its apotheosis in bourgeois art: since a distinctive personal style is seen to be an emanation of the artist's unique sensibility, the bourgeois artist can flaunt his unique sensibility merely in the selection of what he chooses to designate—and has the personal flair to impose on the critics and the art market—as "art" (e.g., Duchamp's toilet and Warhol's Campbell Soup cans). In short, bourgeois art, like bourgeois society, functions on the principle of the apotheosis of the individual. To be famous, i.e., to be instantly recognized as a distinctive individual, is, as Warhol himself pointed out, the great bourgeois dream.

By working collectively and withholding his personal "signature" (the art consumer's guarantee of "originality") Godard challenges this glorification of the individual, and by de-emphasizing the exchange value of his reputation, Godard attempts to shift the film-goer's attention to the use value of a film. But what is the use value of a film? Significantly, in asking this question we run up against a train of thought which permeates bourgeois idealism's thinking on art, namely, that what makes art so special, so wonderful, is that art is the one human endeavor which has *no practical use* [sic] and thereby "frees" man from the "vulgar" material exigencies of life and allows him to function in the "higher" realm of the spirit. A correlative of this idealist contempt for man's material needs is the notion that art, true art, deals with eternal and universal values of the human spirit

and that a concern for the specific issues that urgently confront us in our everyday life has no place in art, or, if it does find a place, is considered an intrusion which weakens the value of the work of art as art. (Witness, for example, the cautious, qualifications, and criticisms offered by American Brecht scholars.)

In short, the dominant idealist thinking on art has the effect of eliminating from art or limiting to a very minimal level what is disparagingly referred to as "politics." Art is treasured, on one hand, for offering man the "free" exercise of his intelligence and imagination, but he is "free" only to exercise his intelligence and imagination on timeless and universal values (particularly on the world of sentiments) that are untainted by "politics." Is this pervasive devaluation of politics accidental? Or does the history of class society indicate that time after time and place after place art has been in the service of the ruling class elites, of pharaohs and priests and emperors and kings and popes and dictators and presidents and philanthropic industrialists, who have held positions of power and privilege in society and who have recognized the *use value*, to *them*, of keeping people's attention diverted from questioning the existing order by providing them with *art*?

And so, interestingly enough, when we ask what is the *use value* of a film or of any work of art, we must also ask *for whom*—and also, unfortunately, *against whom*—art has use value in a class society? (The question of what use value art would have in a classless society is a very interesting one which I intend to explore elsewhere.) Where film is concerned, Godard has found it necessary to reconsider the audience his earlier films reached and to ask himself whether, realistically, that audience of "art buffs" could be expected not only to recognize the class nature of the film art but also to take a class stand *with* the exploited classes in attempting to transform film art into something that would be useful to those working actively, theoretically and practically, for profound, revolutionary social change? Obviously, Godard realized that by no means all—and most likely only a very small minority—of his old art-house

audience could be expected to undergo this radicalization, so deeply engrained were the sophisticated prejudices of idealist aesthetics. Consequently, Godard decided to make it difficult for the old audience to co-opt his new films, starting by refusing to allow the new militant films to be shown in the old temples of the art film. Moreover, Godard and Gorin purposely have made it difficult for any carry-overs from the old audience to relate to the new militant films in the old idealist way, for they want, above all, to use art in a new and revolutionary way that will no longer cover up the class divisions of society and the struggle between the classes but instead will call attention to and aggravate class contradictions by sharpening the line of demarcation between classes and between those willing to involve themselves actively in class struggle and, on the other hand, those not willing to do so. Toward this end, *the Dziga Vertov Group's films throw out a challenge to each spectator to confront the reality of class struggle and to take a stand in it.*

And the challenge is a tough one. The Marxist-Leninist and Maoist slogans which turn so many people off are abundant in these films, and they are embedded in voice-over texts which, to many film-goers, seem to drone on tediously or to rant abrasively. Audiences accustomed to bourgeois movies which emphasize entertainment or "art" are certainly not going to dig hearing lengthy analyses of revisionism or of ideology or of the need to struggle against bourgeois individualism. And they'll couch their objections in terms of our sacrosanct aesthetics—"politics have no place in art"—or in terms of our so-called intellectual objectivity—"I'm willing to discuss these ideas rationally, but, please, no slogans!"—or, finally, on our self-indulgent demand to be entertained—"it's boring"—but all too often these attitudes merely represent some of the dodges by which the bourgeois conscience conveniently rationalizes its avoidance of issues which challenge the political status quo. Whether they are confronted with these issues elsewhere or not, they resent being confronted with them in art, of all places, and walk out—often during the film—feeling

self-righteously indignant.

However, it's by no means only the unpoliticized spectator who gets turned off by these films. Aware that a radical posture is fashionable these days, especially among youth, Godard and Gorin have carefully tried to avoid eliciting the facile, ego-tripping spectator-response of simply shouting "Right on!" at the appropriate signal. In particular, the dogged persistence of the voice-over texts—delivered in monotone—in the Dziga Vertov Group's films, presents a calculated obstacle aimed at separating the superficial, posturing radical role-player from the serious individual who is willing to do the work of exploring and acting upon the issues presented in the films.

*It's the latter, finally, the actively committed Marxist-Leninist or Maoist militant, for whom the films of the Dziga Vertov Group are made.*

The point is worth emphasizing, for there has been a lot of confusion over just whom these films are intended to reach. Much of the confusion has stemmed from those who assumed that since the films take a class stand with the working class they must be made for workers; and from this point discussion has degenerated into the old impasse "but will workers be able to understand these films, aren't they too intellectual for workers?" But Godard and Gorin have argued that their films are not for workers in general, for some vague "masses," but rather are for specific groups of militants, some of whom are workers, some of whom are students, some of whom are simply full-time activists, but all of whom can be expected to involve themselves in the theoretical and practical exploration of issues presented in the films. Moreover, Godard and Gorin have pointed out that it would be presumptuous on their part to make films *for* the masses or even *on behalf of* the masses. Coming from the petit bourgeois milieu, they acknowledge that they do not have the kind of working-class experience of oppression that would enable them to deal with the day-to-day experience of the worker, particularly the worker who has not yet developed a class-conscious analysis of his own oppression and alienation. Nonetheless, what they can do to help bridge

this gap is to begin to work cooperatively and collectively with small groups of militant workers and students and film people who can learn from one another's experience, can exchange information, can begin to share experience by undertaking group projects, and can develop their revolutionary theory and practice simultaneously.

How has this worked out thus far? Well, the planning stages of each of the Dziga Vertov Group's films have involved lengthy discussions with various militant groups which Godard and Gorin have been in constant contact with for several years now. Moreover, the interaction has been reciprocal: the various militant groups have often discussed the planning stages of their actions with Godard and Gorin. When I asked recently if these militant groups were involved in the shooting and, particularly, the editing stages as well as the planning stages of the Dziga Vertov Group's films, Gorin replied that, yes, to a certain extent, they were, especially since he and Godard are firmly committed to Vertov's insistence that editing is a three-stage process that begins with "editing before the shooting" and includes "editing within the shooting" as well as the final "editing after the shooting." In this sense, then, even groups like the Palestinian guerillas, who could obviously not be present in Paris for the "editing after the shooting" stage, can be said to have played a part in the editing process. And this is by no means mere playing with terms, for Godard and Gorin have repeatedly emphasized that unlike other militant film groups such as Newsreel or Chris Marker's *SLON* or the French CGT labor union film group of Paul Seban, the Dziga Vertov Group rejects the "reflection of reality" notion of the cinema and therefore refuses the "go out and get footage" approach (*la chasse aux images*) which invariably emphasizes the "you are there" immediacy quality of events at the expense of a thorough analysis of the causes, effects, relations and contradictions of events.

#### **PRAVDA: A DIALECTICAL MATERIALIST THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE**

This rejection of the facile emphasis on im-

mediacy is most evident in Godard's *Pravda* (a film, by the way, which marks a transition in the Group's work, since Godard planned and shot the film in collaboration with Jean-Henri Roger, discussed and debated the editing of it with Jean-Pierre Gorin, and ended up putting the final cut together entirely on his own)—for *Pravda* is as much a film on how to get at truth (*pravda*), particularly in the cinema, as it is a film on the post-Dubcek situation in Czechoslovakia where it was shot in spring 1969, the year after the Russian armed intervention there. What is ultimately at stake in *Pravda*—and in the Dziga Vertov Group's work as a whole (as well as in the work of the Group's namesake)—is the attempt to elaborate and implement in cinematic terms a *dialectical materialist theory of knowledge*. [For an intelligent but unnecessarily pedantic introduction to Vertov's own efforts to lay the foundations of such an epistemology, see Annette Michelson's recent article on Vertov in *Artforum*, March 1972.]

The first section of *Pravda* presents various images and sounds which Godard's voice-over commentators simply refer to as "external manifestations of the communist reality and the communist irreality in Czechoslovakia today." The methodology of this opening section, they acknowledge, is that of "a political travelogue," and the voice-over text is in the form of a "letter-to-a-friend-back-home." (Here, as in Montequieu's famous *Lettres Persanes*, the procedure of utilizing the point of view of a complete stranger who finds himself in a foreign country has the very constructive and ironic effect of helping us to see "as if with new eyes" things we might otherwise take for granted.)

In *Pravda*, however, the "new eyes" with which we see Czechoslovakia are not meant to be the eyes of just anybody—and in fact Godard clearly wants us to consider that the act of developing a point of view which will enable us to comprehend the situations presented (in the film as in life) is above all a *mental act* in which (despite the eminently visual metaphor of *point of view*) the act of seeing is not necessarily the primary one and may indeed be far less constitutive of a point of view than the act of listen-

ing to the spoken word. Throughout his films, Godard has continually explored different combinations of visual or aural preeminence, weighing the relative usefulness and reliability of the cinematographic image and the spoken word. Sometimes, especially in the early films, Godard seemed to find the image more trustworthy than the all-too-fickle word; more recently, however, as his investigations (starting with *Le Gai Savoir*) have led him to probe more deeply into epistemological questions, the spoken word has clearly asserted its pre-eminence in his films as the conceptualizing element in attaining knowledge.

In *Pravda*, for example, the conceptualizing point of view is established not by the image (which gives one a point of view only in the perceptual sense) but by the spoken words of the man whose voice we hear addressing his letter to "Dear Rosa." His name is Vladimir, and we quickly realize that the point of view of the stranger in Czechoslovakia is that of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin returning to the earth to take a look at the progress of socialism and jotting down his impressions (and the analysis of those impressions) in a letter to "Dear Rosa"—an obvious allusion to Rosa Luxemburg, with whom Lenin, in fact, carried on a famous correspondence.

And what Vladimir sees in contemporary Czechoslovakia doesn't look at all like socialism to him! "... TV girls wearing cashmere sweaters ... billboards for large American corporations in the fields along the highways ... neon signs advertising Russian trains ... tanks, yes, tanks to watch over the peasants ... wire fences the government puts around everything which is the private property of the people ..."—all these are part of the concrete situation in Czechoslovakia. But, as Vladimir admits, these images and sounds are not enough: the material in this first section of *Pravda* is really just a travelogue like any other—"like Delacroix in Algiers or Chris Marker in the strike-torn factories of Rhodiacta. *The New York Times* and *Le Monde* call it news. And I agree with you, Rosa, that it isn't enough. Why? Because it's only the knowledge perceived by our

senses. Now one has to make the effort to rise above this perceptual knowledge. One needs to struggle to transform it into rational knowledge."

This task, then, is undertaken in the second section of *Pravda*. While the "travelogue" could only serve to present fragments of "the concrete situation in Czechoslovakia," the second section presents an attempt to develop "the concrete analysis of the concrete situation."

Vladimir tells us of renting a car at Prague airport—the red car we see in the images. "And guess who we rented it from?" asks Vladimir. "Just as in Moscow, Warsaw, or Bucharest, we rented it from an American company. Hertz or Avis. Two branches of American banking or chemical trusts." And he goes on to explain that the car is a Skoda, manufactured in Czechoslovakia at the factories nationalized in 1945 by the popular democratic forces after their victory over fascism. "Produced in nationalized factories, the Skoda belongs, then, to the Skoda workers—the car should be at the service of the people who produced it. But Hertz and Avis don't rent cars out of good will; they do it for profit. And, deviously, with the complicity of the Czechoslovak leaders, Hertz and Avis have *appropriated* what should rightfully belong to the Czechoslovak people. Moreover, the appropriation of *surplus-value*—theoretically eliminated in socialist countries—makes its ugly re-appearance. And, practically, the more the socialist workers of Skoda work, the more the imperialist shareholders fill their pockets."

What we're dealing with here, Vladimir remarks, is *revisionism in practice*. But Czechoslovakia's reintroduction of various features of capitalism is only one side of the coin of revisionism—and the other is Russia's willingness to accommodate the capitalist West while tightening her bureaucratic stranglehold on the socialist East. And who is always the victim of revisionism? In Moscow as in Prague, it is the worker who suffers the oppression of the bureaucrats who are supposed to serve him. "Once the people have put them in power, the revisionists devote all their energy to keeping the people—especially the working class—out of power. . . . The revisionist bureaucrats, like all

reactionaries, are afraid of the people, that is why they make use of police terror. Just as in the capitalist countries, the ministry of the interior becomes the ministry of oppression."

Equally unsparing in its criticism of both Moscow-style revisionism and Prague-style revisionism, *Pravda* neither justifies nor decries the Russian armed intervention in Czech affairs in August 1968: that is not the major issue. And what little documentary footage Godard uses of Soviet tanks in the streets of Prague is not at all utilized for its dramatic "you-are-there" quality; rather, this material, like the rest, is presented simply as "external manifestations" which need to be organized in the editing so as to "establish a new contradictory relationship between them . . . and to bring into light the internal causes . . . of the present situation in the socialist republic of Czechoslovakia."

The methodology of the film, then, is to move constantly back and forth from practice to theory and from theory to practice. Following step by step the process of acquiring knowledge outlined by Mao Tse-tung in his essay "On Practice," *Pravda* begins with the practice of gathering perceptual knowledge, but the voice-over commentators *immediately* sense the inadequacy of this "travelogue" approach and therefore undertake *right from the start* the theoretical task of transforming perceptual knowledge into conceptual knowledge. And as soon as judgments and inferences have been drawn, theory is tested and developed . . . *in practice*. And, of course, practice constantly creates a new concrete situation which requires a new transformation of theory to produce new knowledge of each new situation. In short, as I have indicated, what is at stake here is a dialectical materialist theory of knowledge in which, as Lenin argued somewhat crudely in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* and with more sophistication in his *Philosophical Notebooks*, consciousness is always "consciousness of some thing," i.e., there is no "ideal" realm of "pure thought"; and knowledge is not disembodied knowledge of the "essence" of *things-in-themselves* but is rather *a dialectical process of interaction, of work, between man and man and between man and*



things. Thus, as Marx so incisively put it, man experiences the world not in order to understand it but to *transform* it.

Likewise, Godard's films are aimed not at helping us to understand the world as a *given* but to understand and affirm our inescapable role of constantly transforming it. Consequently, his films resolutely avoid the detached "eye of God" point of view, and instead openly affirm the work and struggle of the film-maker (Vertov's "man with a movie camera") who, himself, is involved in social practice and the relations of production just like everyone else.

Finally, as important as the epistemological concerns may be in *Pravda*, no discussion of this film is complete without a consideration of how Godard explores issues in this film through his use of color and movement. Right from the beginning, Godard utilizes the colors and movements of Prague's streetcars as a means of calling our attention to one of the film's basic issues—the task of distinguishing the shades and nuances of different types of socialism and the different directions in which they are moving.

"We are in a socialist country," says Vladimir; "whoever says socialist says red. The red of the blood spilled by the workers for their emancipation. But there was fighting between the different kinds of red. Between the red which comes from the left and the red which goes off towards the right." And as we hear this commentary, we see in the image a busy street in downtown Prague; but suddenly a bright red streetcar comes into the frame from the left, blotting out all depth-perception as it fills up nearly the entire screen. The streetcar comes to a halt, its red panels sliding slowly to a stop and revealing slightly orange areas where the red paint is chipped and fading. After a moment's pause, slowly, then quickly gathering speed, the red panels of the streetcar begin sliding off towards the right, their blemishes disappearing again as the streetcar's movement blurs the details so that one sees only the dominant red. But what is behind that unified facade? The seeds of doubt have been planted. Is there a connection between the fact that the red of socialism is beginning to look faded and blemished

and the fact that this same red of socialism, here in Czechoslovakia, is moving towards the right?

Granted, of course, we are operating here at a transparently symbolic level, but Godard's artistry is such that he takes cinematic structures that are aesthetically interesting in themselves (like this shot's organization of color, line, plane, and movement) and builds out of these structures a rich cluster of connotations that both deepens the aesthetic experience and at the same time refers us back out of the internal structures of a work of art into the world of social practice. Instead of merely using the red streetcar shot for its combination of "local color" and abstract beauty (which is how Chris Marker uses an almost identical shot in his *Sunday in Peking*), Godard takes these elements as starting points—eminently cinematic ones—and links the abstract to the concrete while transforming the superficial aspects of "local color" into conceptual tools for probing deeper into the "red of socialism" in Czechoslovakia.

Throughout the film the color red serves as a focal point for highlighting the contradictions of revisionism: repeated shots of a lovely dark red rose—associated with the blood of the workers as well as with "red" Rosa Luxemburg and the "purists" of socialist theory—give way at the end of the film to a shot of that same rose lying trampled in the mud. And the spilling of the workers' blood in their struggle for liberation—referred to early in the film—gives way to the spilling of a glass of rosé wine carelessly poured to overflowing: a symbol of the callous betrayal of the workers (and of socialist principles) by a privileged and élitist bureaucracy. But perhaps the most telling use of color to highlight revisionism's contradictions is so *material* that it is hardly symbolic at all: over a fuzzy shot of an off-red neon sign advertising AGFA film in downtown Prague, Vladimir apologizes for the poor quality of the color, explaining that "it's West German film processed in Soviet labs."

Another recurring image in *Pravda* is a high-angle long shot of a circular tramway interchange where the streetcars of Prague come into the frame from the upper right, proceed leftward

around the circle, discharge their passengers and proceed out to the upper right again. Near the end of the third section of *Pravda*—placed in a crucial position just before the beginning of the brief lyrical ‘coda’ which terminates the film—the circular interchange is seen for the last time, while on the soundtrack we hear the following exchange:

Rosa: *Toi aussi, tes réponses tournent en ronds et nous n'avancons pas.* [You too, your answers are going around in circles and we're not making any progress.]  
 Vladimir: *C'est en tournant en ronds que nous avançons.* [It's in going around in circles that we make progress.]

At one level, metaphorically, the circular streetcar interchange is a graphic representation of the reversal of direction in revisionist Czechoslovakia: the reversal of the red of socialism, moving left with the masses, then leaving the masses behind and moving off to the right again. But at another level, also metaphorically, Vladimir's defense of going around in circles alludes to the circular structure of the film as a whole and to the circular process of moving dialectically from practice to theory back to practice in a constant testing and development of theory (knowledge) as well as a constant transformation of the world (practice). This seemingly off-hand defense of circularity—placed in the mouth of *Pravda's* Vladimir—corresponds with Lenin's own notion (it is Hegel's as well) that “human knowledge is not (or does not follow) a straight line, but a curve, which endlessly approximates a series of circles, a spiral.” Or, as Mao puts it, “Practice, knowledge, again practice, and again knowledge. This form repeats itself in endless cycles, and with each cycle the content of practice and knowledge rises to a higher level. Such is the whole of the dialectical-materialist theory of knowledge, and such is the dialectical-materialist theory of the unity of knowing and doing.”

### **STRUGGLE IN ITALY: MAN'S SOCIAL BEING DETERMINES HIS THINKING**

Continuing their Marxist investigations, Godard and Gorin focused their attention, in *Vent d'Est* (Wind from the East) and *Lotte in Italia*

(Struggle in Italy), on the nature and function of *ideology*—an area which has recently been very fruitfully explored by French Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser. In fact, while planning *Struggle in Italy*, Jean-Pierre Gorin held frequent discussions on the problem of ideology with Althusser, who was then writing an essay entitled “Idéologie et Appareils Idéologiques d'état,” which was subsequently published in the philosophical journal *La Pensée*, no. 151, June 1970, Paris.\* It is not surprising, then, in light of this cross-fertilization of ideas, that the Dziga Vertov Group's *Struggle in Italy* (this time, it is primarily Gorin's work) and Althusser's essay on ideology are as alike as fraternal twins.

This fraternal relation of film and essay, however, has its drawbacks as well as its strengths. Although the central protagonist of *Struggle in Italy* is a young Italian girl who, at the beginning of the film, declares herself “a Marxist and a member of the revolutionary movement,” nonetheless, and in spite of its title, the film is *not* concretely based in any specific situation in Italy or anywhere else. Indeed, it is a film that could have been shot anywhere (much of it was shot in Paris), for it is about a situation that supposedly exists *everywhere* in the advanced industrial capitalist world. On the whole, then, *Struggle in Italy* is a purposely abstract didactic film on the difficulties a young militant girl from a bourgeois background must overcome to rid herself of the ruling class ideology which permeates her consciousness and behavior.

We see in the first part of the film various aspects of her daily life, identified by a male voice-over commentator as “militancy,” “university,” “society,” “family,” “sexuality,” etc. The various “post card” glimpses of her handing out leaflets, going to class, trying on sweaters in a store, monopolizing the bathroom in her family's flat while putting on her make-up, making love, etc., all represent, as she later acknowledges, “a bourgeois account of a bourgeois

\*This essay is now available in English in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* by Louis Althusser, Monthly Review Press, New York and London.

woman who is in contradiction with herself." Interspaced among these admittedly superficial images are lengths of black leader which, we gradually realize, represent gaps in her consciousness—"black spaces" which must be filled in with images that reflect the true nature of her relations to the class society in which she lives. The central problem is that man's knowledge of "reality" is, by reason of his historical position in class struggle, "*a necessarily distorted reflection of his relation to production.*"

It is, of course, the essence of Marxist thought that "man's social being determines his thinking"—and, of course, in Marxist terms, the most important constituents of "social being" are man's relations to production. A given mode of production, like capitalism for example, will entail certain "relations of production"—which relations must be *reproduced* constantly, day after day, by inculcating in individual consciousness values and a worldview that "reflect" these dominant relations of production. This task of reproducing the "relations of production," as Althusser points out, is largely carried out at the level of *ideology*, i.e., by the State's various "vehicles" of ideology. What happens, according to Althusser, in each of these vehicles, is that the individual's real relations to the relations of production are distorted because they are short-circuited into a relation to an Absolute: in the schools, Learning; in church, God; in the courts, Justice; in politics, The Party; in labor organization, The Union; in the communications media, The Facts; in art, Truth and Beauty; and in the family, Proper Behavior. As a result of this ideological short-circuiting, then, an individual's worldview is not a representation of his real relations to the relations of production which ultimately govern his existence, but rather a representation of *imaginary* relations to his real relations to the relations of production. In short, Althusser argues, "ideology equals imaginary relations to real relations."

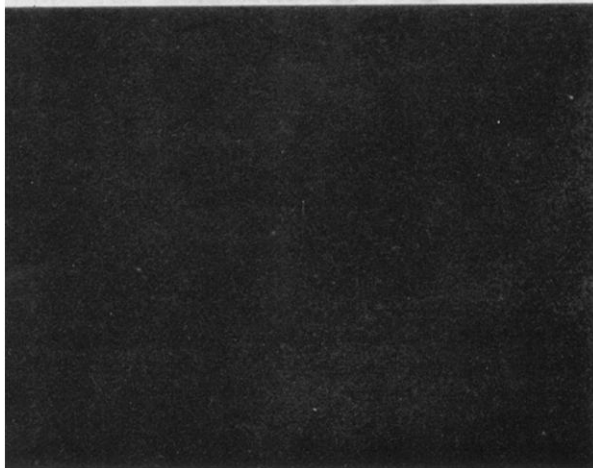
For Paola Taviani, the student militant of *Struggle in Italy* (played by an actress of the same name), the attempts to break out of bourgeois ideology are acts of life-style rebellion: thus in the second part of the film she tries to

"get to know the working class" by striking up a conversation about revolutionary politics with a young salesgirl who waits on her as she tries on sweaters; she tutors a young male worker in mathematics, hoping thereby to "serve the working class"; and she attempts to "revolutionize" her sex life, as well, by arranging with her boy friend to make love in the afternoon instead of at night as they usually have done. But this, too, she realizes, reflects her class privilege: workers can't afford such a luxury, they have to work all afternoon.

Sensing that her efforts thus far have still been marked by a bourgeois mentality, Paola takes a job in a factory. But she is not accepted by the women who operate the other sewing machines: she obviously comes from a different background, has different manners, and is suspect. Why should a pretty young bourgeois girl want to work in a factory? Why should she want to "join the working class?" Finally, the crowning blow comes when she realizes she is not even able to keep up the crushing pace of productivity demanded by the shop foreman.

Trying to analyze these failures, Paola asks herself just what reality or aspect of reality is "reflected" in each of her acts? And she concludes that "the problem is not one of 'reflection' in general, but of *the struggle between reflections which deny the objective contradictions and reflections which reveal and express them*: the struggle between bourgeois ideology which wants the world to stay like it is and revolutionary ideology which wants to change it."

Applying this insight to her own actions, Paola realizes that the various images from the first and second parts of the film have covered up the contradictions because they have reflected only one of the two terms of the objective contradiction. The second term has always been missing—it has been a "black space," a taboo that has remained repressed and inaccessible to her bourgeois consciousness. Now, however, her increased level of consciousness—which, through practice, is more closely aligned with the class consciousness of the working class—enables her to reveal and express the contradictions by filling in the gaps. Thus the film repeats



images from the first and second parts, but now a shot of Paola trying on a sweater in a boutique is not followed by "black space" but by a shot of the manufacturer's workshop where the sweater is made. Consumption is no longer something accomplished in a void; it is related to the relations of production. As other images are re-



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peated, they too are complemented now by images of the relations of production.

These shots of factories, workshops, delivery trucks, etc., do not offer solutions in themselves; but they help Paola to understand that these "relations of production," which, as she remarks, in Italy today are "specifically capitalist relations of production," have been "reflected" in even the least suspect areas of her consciousness and behavior. And this "reflection" has been subject to the ideological distortion which substitutes *imaginary* relations to production for the real ones which have conditioned her social being and her thinking.

But now that Paola has seen through this ideological distortion, the film does not come to an end. Godard and Gorin make it clear that heightened awareness is not an end in itself. It is not enough merely to understand the world; the real task is to change it. Nonetheless, the achievement of class consciousness and the struggle to pierce the veil of bourgeois ideology play an important role in the revolutionary transformation of the world. As the male voice-over commentator of *Struggle in Italy* puts it, "We must recognize that at a certain point in the revolutionary struggle, the most important task is *theory*." Moreover, the importance of ideological struggle must not be underestimated: Engels, one will recall, attached such importance to it that he maintained (in a famous passage of a letter to Franz Mehring) that seeing through bourgeois ideology would destroy it. For ideology to function effectively, he argued, it had to remain *unconscious*. "Otherwise," he remarked, "the whole ideology would collapse."

But in *Struggle in Italy* Godard and Gorin have only dealt with the struggle of one individual to see through bourgeois ideology. For Paola Taviani, this ideology may indeed collapse; but the larger task which the film engages is that of *bringing ideological struggle out into the open* where each individual can begin to discover for himself his real relation to the process of production. In line with this task, then, Paola defines the path she must take: "To make a change in my life, to bring about a transformation in myself means heightening the contradic-

tions between my militant practice and the dominant bourgeois ideology. It means bringing class struggle into my personal life."

Finally, flaunting the state-owned RAI-TV network in Milan for whom *Struggle in Italy* was made—and who subsequently refused to show it—Godard and Gorin close the film by having Paola sing the first verse of *The Internationale* while the male voice-over commentator declares repeatedly that the future will be a future *di lavoro e di lotta*: of work and struggle.

### VLADIMIR AND ROSA: THEATER AS REVOLUTION, NOT REVOLUTION AS THEATER

Although at first viewing the insistent comedy of *Vladimir and Rosa* seems to set this film somewhat apart from the theoretical explorations of the previous Dziga Vertov Group films, nonetheless, in its own humorous way, *Vladimir and Rosa* takes up the issues defined at the close of its immediate predecessor, *Struggle in Italy*: the necessity of heightening the contradictions between one's militant practice and the dominant bourgeois ideology by bringing class struggle into one's personal life, and thereby *changing one's life*.

There has been much talk, of course, about "life-style change" and the rise of a "counter-culture" in which each aspect of an individual's appearance and behavior can be interpreted—and is often consciously intended—as a *sign* of that individual's rejection of the "straight" life-style. Among certain segments of the counter-culture there is even a special prestige attached to being a "heavy," someone who flaunts the conventional *mores* outrageously with his or her bizarre—and often very theatrical—appearance and behavior. Indeed, the theatricality of everyday life in the polarized America of the late sixties is a subject that has been much discussed; and I suppose the prevailing attitude toward this phenomenon is a negative one: people seem to feel that theater should be clearly separated from "real life."

Old prejudices against the theater, a certain moral stigma attached to the profession of actors and actresses, and perhaps a mixture of fear and envy which the ordinary individual experiences

when confronted with people who have a gift for acting out the extraordinary, the full gamut of human passions—all these are undoubtedly involved, even if unconsciously, in people's attitudes on this matter. Then, too, there is a tendency to believe that the polarization of society, itself, is responsible for the theatricalization of everyday life—an attitude which critically fails to understand the very considerable theatricality that is involved in acting out social roles in even the most homogeneous societies. [For excellent material on this subject, see Erving Goffman's *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*.]

But the demand for a strict demarcation between theater and reality is even expressed, very outspokenly, by Robert Brustein, who, as a man of the theater, ought to know better. (Brustein is a drama critic, a director, and dean of Yale Drama School.) Seemingly unaware of the irony of his position, Brustein bristles at any theatricality outside of the theater; and, once he has spotted any, refuses to see anything below the surface of theatricality. This leads him to such follies as thinking he can dismiss the Black Panthers for their "public-relations-conscious paramilitary costumes"—thus writing them off as "mere" theater—and, on the other hand, so thoroughly misunderstanding the point of the Chicago 7's theatrical defense tactics that he offers the admittedly "terrible judicial overkill" of that trial as demonstrating that theatricality is counter-productive. In short, while justifiably indignant at the market-oriented revolutionary posturings of entertainers and the fashion-oriented revolutionary posturings of "the radical chic," Brustein utterly fails to understand, or even, it seems, to examine the various functions which theatricality can perform outside as well as inside the theater.\*

\*I single out Brustein because he has been extremely vociferous in denouncing both the growing "theatricalization of everyday life" and the avant-garde trends in drama (happenings, multi-media events, etc.) which encourage the blurring of distinctions between theater and reality. For further discussion of these issues—and of Brustein's position on them—see the sections entitled "Event as Theatre/Theatre as Event" and "The Film Revolution" in Albert J. LaValley's interesting

And it is precisely such an examination that Godard and Gorin undertake in *Vladimir and Rosa*, a film which re-enacts, very theatrically, the theatrical antics of the Chicago 7. In this film Godard and Gorin take all sorts of artistic liberties with the facts of the Chicago trial—like including two young women among the defendants—but they very faithfully retain the hilarious Yippie tone of the proceedings: and, in many ways, *Vladimir and Rosa*, for all its levity, qualifies as a reconstituted documentary. Focussing, as it does, on a much-publicized trial, it even has an illustrious antecedent in Méliès's theatricalized reconstruction of the famous Dreyfus trial. And in this sense, *Vladimir and Rosa* is part of Godard's continuing reflection on the cinema's way of getting at truth through a dialectical synthesis of the fictional and the real.

Although the *commedia dell'arte* style of this film would seem to put the emphasis on the fictional aspect, Godard and Gorin are clearly interested in the *significance* of the Chicago trial—which they see manifested in the defendants' theatrical ways of carrying out their defense. Moreover, they sensitively distinguish a number of different defense styles in the trial: the rollicking and outrageously carefree style of Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin, the more serious analytical approach of the dedicated militants among the defendants (here Godard undoubtedly has in mind Tom Hayden), the more traditional "bleeding liberal" approach taken by David Dellinger and his attorney William Kunstler (identified as "John Kunstler" in the film), and, finally the dignified rage of Bobby Seale (identified as "Bobby X" in the film) as he stands up for his legal right to serve as his own counsel—a right denied him by Judge Hoffman (the film identifies him as "Judge Himmeler"), who ordered Bobby bound and gagged for

his "disorderly" refusal to give up his rights.

These different defense styles, as interpreted by Godard and Gorin, represent the respective defendant's willingness or unwillingness to make a thorough break with the system. Thus, the Yippies' break is demonstrated by their scorn for normal legal procedures and their refusal to treat the legal system with the fear and reverence which the repressive order demands of its subjects. On the other hand, Bobby Seale's break is demonstrated by his cool and courageous stand in provoking the system to reveal that in America "justice" is selective, that blacks cannot even expect the courts to let them utilize in their defense what few rights they are supposed to have. As for the dedicated militants in the trial, the film seems to understand implicitly why their actions at the trial seemed pale and insignificant compared to Abbie and Jerry's antics and to Bobby's determination: namely, the militants' main task is *organization*, and that task requires patience and discretion rather than public flamboyance. (In the film one of the militant defendants talks of his organizing work in factories.)

Contrasted to these three positions, however—all of which demonstrate different ways of making a clean break with the system—is the William Kunstler-David Dellinger approach, which Godard and Gorin label *une mise-en-scène bourgeoise, style comédie française*, and which they liken to the stuffy, traditional legal defense put forth in France recently by the otherwise intensely militant editors of a Maoist workers' paper called *La Cause du Peuple*. "Although the people being tried in Paris had been working in ways leading to a new conception of political action," Gorin explains, "they were not acting in a new way in the trial itself." Likewise, Dellinger and Kunstler might express their criticisms of the American political and legal systems, but their courtroom procedure—polite, learned, and formal—could be seen as largely a product of their bourgeois background and their liberal humanist respect for *some* legal process, even if it was a thoroughly corrupt one. In short, as Godard puts it, "they hadn't radicalized themselves yet."

anthology, *The New Consciousness*, recently published by Winthrop Publishers, Cambridge, Mass. On the specific issue which most concerns us here—the function of theatricality in making revolutionary social change—Brustein has made his position all too clear in an article entitled "Revolution as Theatre," *New Republic*, March 14, 1970.

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Throughout the film the emphasis is on the way one *acts*, for the film's basic thesis seems to be that our relationship to the repressive system around us is demonstrated in our way of *acting*—and the theatrical metaphor is particularly appropriate for that eminently theatrical situation known as a trial. In this sense, then, if revolution seems theatrical, it is not, as Brustein argues, because revolution has become (mere) theater, but rather because theater too is a way of making the revolution. As Brecht put it, "We are concentrating on theater precisely because we wish to prepare a means of pursuing our affairs via the theater too. We must not be led by the urgency of our situation to destroy the means we want to make use of. The more haste, the less speed. The surgeon who has heavy responsibilities needs the little scalpel to lie lightly and easily in his hand. The world is out of joint, certainly, and it will take powerful movements to manipulate it all back again. But among the various relevant instruments there can be one that is light and delicate and needs to be handled with ease."

In *Vladimir and Rosa*, as in the Chicago trial itself, the theatrical style is predominantly one of slapstick comedy. In fact, this is a film that might well have been made by the Marx Brothers—Groucho, Chico, Harpo, Zeppo . . . and Karl—with the whole gang on trial not for rioting or even inciting to riot, but for "conspiracy to incite to riot." Much of the humor in this film comes from the antics of Godard and Gorin themselves, for they are on screen quite a lot either as Yippie defendants (they seem to have cast themselves as Abbie and Jerry, though Jean-Luc stands trial as "Friedrich Vladimir" and Jean-Pierre as "Karl Rosa"—whence the film's title) or in their equally humorous role as film-makers attempting to "make political film politically." Early in the film they hilariously stammer their way through a self-interview carried out on a tennis court (Jean-Luc pacing up and down on one side of the net with headphones and a directional mike; Jean-Pierre on the other side lugging a tape recorder), with both men oblivious to the tennis balls whizzing by them (and occasionally bouncing off them)



from the game of mixed doubles being played on that same court.

In addition to their stammering and stuttering, Godard and Gorin adopt zany accents throughout the film that make French come out sounding like a mixture of Portuguese and German. In their self-interview on the tennis court—the subject of which, naturally enough, is how to make political film politically—they make a series of puns on the word *balles* (alternatively "balls" . . . as in "tennis balls," "bullets" . . . as shot from guns, and "balls" . . . as in the French equivalent of small round candy drops), and Godard points out, stammeringly, that *le cin  -mama* (that's the best pun of them all) also shoots bullets . . . sugar-coated bullets that can be deadly. But the essential problem for them, as militant film-makers, he explains, is how to render in images *la rupture*—the break with the system. And one way to do it, he suggests, is "to find the images that oppress us in order to destroy them." And in that sense, the image we see at that very moment is a good illustration of what Godard is talking about, for this shot juxtaposes the bourgeois complacency and leisure of the tennis players, on one hand, with the *work* and *struggle* (both class struggle and struggle for the means of cinematic production) of the militant film-makers. Later in the film, Godard again takes up the notion of the film-maker's break with the system, and he makes the voice-over comment that "one can't be content just to break with *narrative*"—a self-critical reference to an earlier stage of his own development on the way to making political film politically.

As the film progresses, however, the humor takes a decidedly vulgar turn (as Groucho's was known to do occasionally)—especially when Godard and Gorin detail an elaborate "shit-eating test" they recommend for determining whether prospective jurors are racists, or when they don police uniforms and do an agit-prop demonstration of police brutality by having Jean-Luc unzip his fly and pull out a huge phallic billy-club. Finally, there is a lame but amusing in-joke on the Dziga Vertov Group's characteristic inclusion of sections of "black leader," which they triumphantly identify in this film as signifying the involuntary absence of a real "black leader," Bobby Seale, who, of course, was forcibly separated from the rest of the defendants during the Chicago trial and ordered to stand trial alone at a later date.

In spite of the rough spots, however, the comic tone of *Vladimir and Rosa* is refreshing. (As Brecht wrote, "A theater that can't be laughed in is a theater to be laughed at.") For one thing, it indicates that far from losing his

sense of humor in the process of becoming radicalized, Godard has just as keen a wit as ever. Moreover, far from relegating humor to some "private" area of his life where revolutionary firmness might momentarily be relaxed, Godard clearly has a healthy recognition that humor can be an effective weapon in the revolutionary struggle. And that's a lesson not every would-be revolutionary has learned, I'm afraid.

And on the larger question of the function of theatricality in the struggle for revolutionary social change, *Vladimir and Rosa* demonstrates Godard and Gorin's sensitive understanding of the very significant revolutionary uses of theatricality both in the Brechtian sense, in the theater, and in the Abbie Hoffman-Jerry Rubin sense, in the streets. Whether in changing your consciousness or in changing your life-style, theatricality can have an important role to play—and, as film-makers seeking to make political films politically, Godard and Gorin clearly intend to continue their explorations into the dialectics of theater and life, art and reality.

## LORANT CZIGANY

# Jancsó Country

## MIKLÓS JANCsó AND THE HUNGARIAN NEW CINEMA

It has often been said that the Hungarian national obsession is history. The reason is simple enough: for a small country, Hungary has a miserably eventful history. Since the collapse of the independent kingdom in 1526, the country has been oppressed by powerful friends and foes alike. The course of events—open rebellions, uprisings, wars of independence, revolutions and counter-revolutions—might seem to provide a colorful, somewhat romantic narrative for the outsider. For the Hungarians, however,

it is a deadly business: one long struggle for survival. What is surprising is that in spite of the continuous struggle, the Hungarians maintained their own ethnic identity, and were able to create a national culture.

The intelligentsia, particularly the writers, has always represented the vanguard of the forces responsible for much of the historical consciousness. The new generation of cinema directors that has emerged in the past ten years must be seen in the context of this tradition.

The development of the Hungarian cinema reflects only too well the ups and downs of re-

*Note:* Jancsó is pronounced YAN-cho.